

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING AND TECHNOLOGY? A SERVICE LEARNING COURSE AT THE DOLAN SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

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Introduction

As a Jesuit institution, Fairfield University has a strong commitment to developing students who are aware of the world around them, and whose education takes them beyond their academic focus. They are presented with varying views on topics and are encouraged to engage in critical thinking in class and elsewhere. It is only by asking the critical questions that the students are able to form opinions and determine the action they are called to take. A characteristic of Jesuit educational institutions is the curriculum of Liberal Arts, to which are added any professional education a student might wish to pursue. Professional schools often focus on delivering the body of knowledge on which the students will be tested by an external organization, Accounting being one such example. It is easy to claim that the demands of the profession are such that the graduating students must possess certain knowledge in order to be accepted into their professional groups, leaving little room for unrelated material.

However, it is important to link them to the fundamental principles on which Catholic institutions are built. Many of our students, and some others, are quite uninformed about the importance of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) to themselves and to the world of which they are part. Students in “Technology and Society” (IS 220) are introduced to CST in the first class. The material presented to the class, is excerpted from the book, *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret* (Henriot et al, 2001). The instructor first presents the material from the Papal encyclicals in summary form. Later, as the students explore the text for the course, the students are encouraged to link the contents of a particular chapter to a corresponding CST principle. Those principles invariably enter into each class discussion. The student reaction has been overwhelmingly positive as they learn about the principles of CST. The instructor periodically draws the students’ attention to the “Fourteen Major Lessons” presented in the Henriot book.

Brief description of “Technology and Society”

Seeking to present the students with a framework from which to make their life decisions, the author developed a course unlike any other in the school at the time. The course is entitled “Technology and Society” and has no prerequisites. It is offered by the Information Systems and Operations Management Department in the Dolan School of Business. An important characteristic of the course is that the Office of Service Learning (SL) at Fairfield University has designated it as an SL course. The SL office assists the instructor in finding community partners for the particular service assignment that the instructor considers appropriate for the course. The Office of SL also arranges for transportation to and from the sites; students in the class usually volunteer to drive the university vans reserved for the class period. In IS 220, twenty students typically spend one hour each week at an inner-city high or a middle school, in an after-school program. The college students assist the high school students in their preparation for the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT). Without passing that test, a student is unable to obtain the high school diploma. The middle school students seek assistance in researching

information for class projects or reports. The CAPT preparation in this high school program involves using packaged software selected by the teachers for this purpose.

The first week of the course deals with the Papal Encyclicals presented in Henriot text. The instructor does not identify them as encyclicals initially, but merely displays a list of “essay” titles on the screen. The students are asked to comment on the possible origin of those essays. They are invariably surprised to learn that they are all Papal Encyclicals. We then examine the salient features of several of the documents that have some relevance to the course content.

The main textbook for the course is, *“Technology & The Future”* (Teich, 2006) which explores the effect of technology on various segments of the world’s people and the environment in which they live. The instructor uses videos at four junctures in the course that illustrate specific readings in the text. The instructor repeatedly draws the students’ attention to the link between CST and the topics in the text as the classroom discussion dictates. A brief sampling of the chapter titles in the Teich text are: “How Society Shapes Technology”; “The Role of Technology in Society”; “Feminist Perspectives of Technology”; “Terrorism and the Brittle Technology”; “Civil Liberties in a Time of Crisis”; “Hard Cell: A Commentary on the President’s Stem Cell Address”; “Modern Global Climate Change”; “Computer Ethics”. The book contains some articles that are 30 years old, but seminal in the material presented. The text also has recent articles on the controversy over stem cell research, and the U.S. Government response to it, which is a more contemporary debate. Most of the chapters present a balanced view of each topic, and the students are expected to research the recent developments of the topic in preparation for the class discussion. IS 220 is one of the courses offered to the Ignatian Residential College students, a group that takes some courses together, and lives in community on campus. The classroom discussion often continues in the residence, as students report.

Ignatian Pedagogy

Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), recorded his experiences in the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Ratio Studiorum* to convey a consistent process of formation for new Jesuits. This 500 year-old pedagogy is inspired by faith, and even those who do not share a faith can “gather valuable experiences from this document because ...it is profoundly human and consequently *universal*” (Duminuco, 2000). This pedagogical paradigm is a style of teaching and learning. It calls for an “*infusion* of approaches to value learning and growth *within existing curricula*” (Duminuco, 2000). One has to be trained to be an effective instructor using this pedagogy. Ignatian pedagogy is addressed to teachers first, as it suggests how a teacher should relate to students, conceives of learning, how a teacher engages a student’s quest for truth, and what the teacher expects from the students. All these elements have significant formative effects on student learning (Duminuco, 2000).

Ignatian pedagogy leads the learner away from excessively utilitarian leanings, away from a tendency towards financial success and its resultant effects of self-absorption and selfishness. It leads learners to develop reasoned attitudes towards other people and the world in which they live. The students accomplish this by exploring facts, asking questions, seeking solutions, and the implications of their findings. It also confirms some of the CST principles they learned in the first week of the course. They learn to reflect on the information they have acquired, and after appropriate consideration, they may feel called to action. The mission of the Jesuits is rooted “in

the belief that a new world community of justice, love, and peace needs educated persons of competence, conscience, and compassion” (Duminuco, 2000). It is thus pedagogy for faith and justice, which respects a reverence for the freedom, rights, and power of learners, who will create a new life for themselves. This system integrates the intellectual and moral, with the result that students are often transformed by this education, and could alter the way they think and act in the world they will soon enter as independent adults. They seek the greater good rather than personal gain. This comes from a commitment to justice, and the commitment to enhance the quality of life for the poor, oppressed, and marginalized.

The Ignatian pedagogical model calls on the instructor to follow five principles: *Context, Experience, Reflection, Action, and Evaluation*. The Ignatian pedagogue accompanies the learners along the right path, getting them accustomed to finding their own way. Ignatian pedagogy is a way that teachers accompany students in their growth and development. The Instructor should:

- Consider the *context* of each student’s life;
- Foster a broad base of *experience* to make the material come alive to the learners;
- Help students *reflect* upon subject matter, to broaden and deepen their awareness of themselves and the world around them;
- Encourage students to use their own experience and awareness through *action* in service of others; reflection often leads to action; and
- *Evaluate* the whole person. Jesuit institutions seek to develop “women and men for others” and to the extent the courses encourage the students to reach beyond their familiar environs, they open the minds and hearts of the students to achieving greater things in the service of others (JSEA, 2000).

The Ignatian pedagogical paradigm of experience, reflection, and action, requires the instructor to accompany the learners as they encounter truth and explore deeper meaning. Reflection is an essential dynamic in this paradigm. A more comprehensive paradigm would include, as described earlier, context before experience, and evaluation after action. The sequence is thus context, experience, reflection, action, and evaluation.

Context of Learning is important at the start of the process. The teacher should learn something about the environment from which the learner comes. Personal care and concern (*cura personalis*) is a hallmark of a Jesuit institution. Teachers and others in the institution must therefore know as much as possible, about the socio-economic, political, and cultural aspects of the learner, be conscious of the school’s learning environment, and the student’s previous learning.

Experience in the Ignatian model goes beyond merely acquiring knowledge and information. Instructors must infuse the students with an experience that includes the mind, heart, and will, in the learning experience. The total affective and cognitive dimension enlivens the learning experience, and moves the learner to action. This stems from the probing, questioning, and ‘touching’ the topic, which is part of *experience*.

Reflection is perhaps one of the aspects least attempted in contemporary education. Students need time to assimilate the material presented in class, and then they need time to think about the

way in which the facts affect them and others in their world. Here reflection is an opportunity to review the topic, its relationship to other topics and facts, who or what is affected by it, the possible options for action, and the effect of each. This thoughtful consideration of some subject matter, fosters a better understanding of the material and the truths therein, deepens understanding of the implications for the student and others. Experiencing the subject also helps the student begin to answer the question “Who am I?” The instructor’s challenge at this stage is to present the students with questions that will broaden the students’ awareness, to consider others’ viewpoints, and the impact on the poor and disadvantaged. This cannot be imposed on the students, but it must emerge from an environment created by the instructor, that encourages such a reaction. It is clear that Experience and Reflection are interrelated and iterative and is the spring from which the students grow in their understanding of themselves and the world around them.

Action proceeds from Experience and Reflection, or the earlier processes would be truncated, as far as Ignatian pedagogy is concerned. Experience and Reflection move the student to action and commitment, particularly to service of the poor. Action is a manifestation of human growth based upon experience and reflection, according to Ignatius. First, the student examines the choices he or she has made and the effect the choices might have on others and self. This interiorized choice leads to an external action that is consistent with the new conviction. This may be a personal change of habit or action in service to others, flowing from the preceding phases.

Evaluation in Ignatian pedagogy goes beyond measurement of academic mastery, to include a student’s well-rounded growth. This requires the instructor to be a mentor, to glean from written reflections and personal meetings how a student has grown, and in what way. Each student grows at a different pace, and only the conversations would help the student to understand the feelings and conflicts that may have arisen. The student should thus learn how to assess the results of the reflection and action, and what, if anything should be changed.

Duminuco (2000) presents the loop (Fig 1) that is an essential element of Ignatian pedagogy:

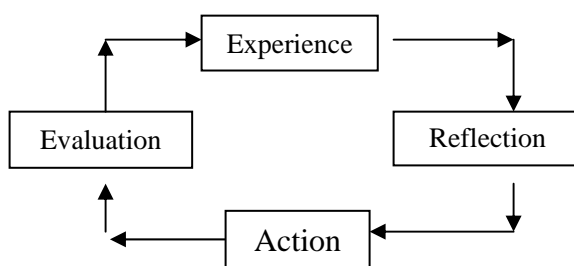


Fig 1

Duminuco (2000) reminds us that the repetition is helpful for student growth. Ignatian pedagogy applies to all curricula, is fundamental to the teaching-learning process, makes better teachers, personalizes learning, and stresses the social dimension of learning and teaching (Duminuco, 2000).

The course and the materials

IS 220 is conducted in the nearly 500 year-old Ignatian Pedagogical model. The undergraduate course is offered as one 150-minute session each week. The class is divided into two segments of almost equal length; one segment of each class is held in the classroom, the second segment is conducted on site at a community partner's location in nearby Bridgeport, CT. Bridgeport is the largest city in Connecticut and it's poorest. It is a mere 5 minute drive from the Fairfield University campus. Students spend a minimum of 9 weeks in this service environment, individually involved with a student from a local high school or community center, with the instructor present at all times. Bridgeport is a culturally diverse city, where the demographics have changed over the past 30 years. Rather than the earlier white Irish and German immigrants, Bridgeport now has a large Hispanic population (31.9%), as well as White Non-Hispanic (30.9%), Black (30.8%) and others (City Data, 2008). Fairfield University students are mainly affluent white Christians, whereas the Bridgeport school population is mostly from lower income levels, and are different from the typical Fairfield University student. While the recent Fairfield University student population has begun to manifest significant diversity, it is not yet sufficiently diverse to compare with the students in the Bridgeport schools. However, the cultural and socio-economic differences between Bridgeport and Fairfield University students are rapidly bridged as the students become deeply involved with one another. Fairfield students assist their charges in preparing for CAPT examinations using technology, or in the lower grades, helping them with their homework. Sometimes the parents are included in the classes that use technology. After some sessions in Bridgeport, Fairfield University students request a class debriefing to share their experiences, and to help reflect on and process particular incidents that they encountered.

Once the preliminary explanation of the course is complete, the students are given time to examine the chapters in the Teich text. Most chapters are short, no more than 20 pages. Students usually select a partner with whom they will present the material in the chapter they selected. The students are assigned to lead the discussion each week, and link their discussion in some way to CST and current developments related to the chapter. They sometimes take provocative positions to draw their classmates out and generate debate. It is an important exercise as students learn to listen to views with which they might disagree strenuously, and to offer rebuttals in a respectful and constructive way. Students learn to research their positions to justify a position they wish to take. This is a subtle opportunity to present the CST principles warning against political apathy, and several other encyclicals that address social justice and human dignity.

Having set the tone of the class and its format, the instructor works with the students to ensure the quality of the presentation. The students present the material, and develop questions for discussion. In IS 220, prior to each class session, students are required to submit online, a summary of the chapters scheduled for discussion at the following class, and questions that have arisen because of the students' reading and reflection. Thus, the presenters are aware that the class has read the chapter, and may summarize the material briefly, but then explore the recent developments related to the material, linking it to CST where applicable. This technique works very well, and in the era of the Internet and instant information, the problem is not the availability of material, but the validity of the source. There is lively discussion in every class, and the instructor (who sits in the rear of the room) is careful to ensure that those who wish to

speak are heard, that the conversation is respectful (“respectful disagreement” is a familiar phrase), and that the presenters have made an adequate effort to update the textbook article with current events. From the sample chapter titles listed above, it is clear that some of the topics are controversial, and sometimes challenge long-held family values and views. Sometimes student opinions are altered, and it causes personal upheaval, which often results in a personal written reflection. The students often express their surprise at the CST documents on the obligation to care for the environment, and to respect labor. The instructor is always available to help the students explore or process their ideas or concerns. This might be related to the reading material, the class discussion, or the reassessment of some of their values. This is part of Ignatian pedagogy, where the student learning process is of paramount importance.

Service Learning

There are several definitions of service learning, but in Jesuit schools, SL is a natural way to implement Ignatian pedagogy. It also embodies some of the CST principles such as subsidiarity, and concern for those less fortunate, provided the service location is in an area that brings to life some of the principles of CST. Bringle and Hatcher defined service learning as a “course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (Bringle and Hatcher, 1995). IS 220 meets the above definition, although the course content covers a broader spectrum than the service aspect offers the students.

A group of faculty and staff at Jesuit universities who are associated with service learning meet regularly. That group agreed to a common understanding of what service learning should encompass at their institutions. Their definition is, “Jesuit service learning embraces Ignatian pedagogy by the mutual enhancement of learning with service, justice, and related civic engagement activities. Through reflection, students recognize and expand their understanding of the challenges faced by people who are marginalized and oppressed. Respect for reciprocal relationships, through community partnerships, is central to the successful integration of academic learning and experience, and enlarges the worldviews of all involved. As a student’s intellectual and personal awareness develops, there is transformative spiritual and humanistic growth leading to continued action for the benefit of the common good.” IS 220 clearly falls within the norms suggested in this definition as well.

Both the above definitions are attempts to make the Academy “a more vigorous partner in the search for answers to our most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems, and must reaffirm its historic commitment to what I call the scholarship of engagement” (Boyer, 1997). Ensuring the intellectual content, which stems from the readings, class discussion, and individual reflection, protects the academic integrity of the course. This is consistent with the suggestion that higher education must “build important collaborative partnerships, improve all forms of scholarship, nurture the support of stakeholders, and contribute to the common good” (Bringle et al, 1999).

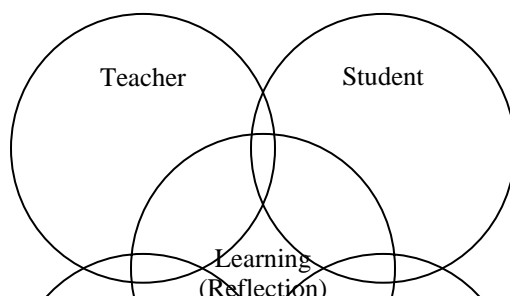


Figure 2

Cress (2005) showed the centrality of reflection in describing how service learning differs from other courses. Figure 2 shows the concentric circles formed by the teacher, student, community service and the course content, as developed by Cress (2005). It is clear that Cress considers reflection a central component of the process. It ties all the elements of the course together, and gives the student the opportunity to consider the relationship of the course material and the life he or she leads.

While there are several terms for this experience, such as service-learning, community service, or community-based learning, Fairfield University uses the term service learning, and this author uses the term in this article. It should not be confused with volunteerism, internship, or practicum, each of which share some similarities with service learning, but do not integrate all the components of service learning as defined and described here. A useful tool in the design and development of a service-learning course could be the “Service-Learning Course Design Workbook” developed by the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning (Howard, 2001).

At the end of the first class, the author administers a brief survey (Appendix I) to the students in IS 220 to help students consider the type of citizens they perceive themselves to be. Cress et al (2005) presented useful information on the topic of citizenship, and the author developed the aforementioned survey on that information. The students complete the survey at the end of the course as well. The author hopes to gather sufficient data to analyze the difference in perception and self-awareness if any, resulting from the prolonged service experience. The answers to the questions are Y or N, the average time for completing the survey instrument is less than five minutes, and there is no identification of the respondents. The data is stored in a database for later analysis.

Reflections

The students in IS 220 write numerous personal reflections on aspects of the course that touch them. Later in the course, the students are more likely to write reflections on their own perceptions of life, and the changes caused by class discussion and reflection. The instructor has

to provide initial guidance on the method and writing of a reflection. The plight of the inner-city students is always a concern of the more affluent Fairfield students, the misuse of technology, the ethical and moral lapses of corporations and governments also enter into their reflections. The students frequently remark publicly and privately how much they learned from the discourse and service experience, both about the conditions of the world and its people, and about themselves. The latter is the result of the personal reflection that is a major component of the class. Students frequently report on finding their calling as a result of the service or readings. It is one effect of the required reflections and which give the students an opportunity to retreat to a quiet space in which to ponder the question at hand. It is from this space that some students emerge with a strong feeling of whom they are and who they are called to be. The students in the Ignatian Residential College at Fairfield University are asked to reflect on three questions: “Who am I, Whose am I, and Who am I called to be?” These questions are addressed in IS 220, as the students grow in their ability to reflect and to connect their daily activities, with their courses, developing a sense of themselves.

The students are also required to write a brief paper on a topic of their choosing, which relates CST to one of the chapters in the text, or how SL and CST are interrelated. This course embodies the mission of the university and the school, in that it deals with the technical aspects of the subject, but draws on each individual’s responsibility for the environment and for those less fortunate in society. This is not done overtly, but as part of the class discussion on topics that cover every major area of CST. The students have other opportunities to make the connection between the mission and course work, but it is not done in the context of a single course. In addition, the students lead the discussion, giving them the opportunity to learn how to present their views in an organized and convincing manner, and to defend those views if they are challenged. The process of making them aware of their responsibilities to others, particularly those less fortunate than themselves emerges from the discussions and the service experience, thus fulfilling the mission of the university.

Conclusion

CST is foundational to many organizations, but particularly to Catholic institutions. However, it appears to be a “well kept secret” even among many Catholics. The students at Fairfield University many of whom are Catholic, are similarly uninformed about CST, and are pleasantly surprised to learn about the teachings, especially as they apply to contemporary issues. CST thus provides them with a fundamental grounding for their future decision-making as citizens in a complex world.

Linking CST to technology and the decisions surrounding their penchant for blind acceptance of technology gives them a reason to evaluate their actions using an objective standard. The author considers this an important part of a student’s education. The lifestyle, to which many students at Fairfield University have become accustomed, may not be sustainable. The climate and other factors are changing as never before. They are called to make decisions about matters as complicated as Stem Cell Research, and Cloning, about appropriate alternative fuel development and its effect on food supply, and many other significant dilemmas. For many of these issues, guidance could be found in some of the documents in CST. Students are comfortable with this linkage between CST and some of the decisions they are asked to make during the course. The

service-learning aspect concretizes the learning and integrates the material from this and other courses in a way that could have a long lasting effect on the students' formation.

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Appendix I

What kind of a Citizen

You are a responsible member of your school/town/country

You work and pay taxes

You support recycling efforts

You contribute to food/clothing drives

You think that social problems would be solved if citizens acted honestly, and helped one another

You belong to a community/campus organization as an active member

You organize efforts to improve the lives of those in need, economically or environmentally

Organize group activities for particular causes

Organized a food /clothing drive

You think that to solve social problems, citizens must participate and lead if necessary within established community organizations

You critically assess social, political, and economic structures to find root causes

You actively seek out and address areas of injustice

You are knowledgeable about social movements, and how to effect change

You explore why people are hungry, and act to solve root causes

You think that to solve social problems, citizens must question and change established structures that produce unjust results